DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 672 EC 304 964

AUTHOR	Edgar, Eugene; Johnson, Ernest
TITLE	Relationship Building & Affiliation Activities in School-Based Dropout Prevention Programs: Rationale & Recommendations for Action. ABC Dropout Prevention and Intervention Series.
INSTITUTION	California Univ., Santa Barbara. Graduate School of Education.; Minneapolis Public Schools, Minn.; Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Inst. on Community Integration.; Seattle Public Schools, Wash.; Washington Univ., Seattle. Coll. of Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Dec 95
CONTRACT	H023K0001; H023K0011; H023K0017
NOTE	21p.; For related documents, see EC 304 962-966.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota, 109 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive, S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455 ($8).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; *Affiliation Need; Attachment Behavior; Behavior Disorders; Change Strategies; Discipline; *Dropout Prevention; Emotional Development; *Emotional Disturbances; Extracurricular Activities; Federal Programs; High Risk Students; High Schools; Hispanic Americans; Intervention; Junior High Schools; *Learning Disabilities; Middle Schools; *Program Development; *Student Adjustment; Student Development; Student Participation; Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	ABC Projects

ABSTRACT

Based on the findings of three federally financed dropout prevention programs--ALAS (Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success), the Belief Academy, and Check & Connect--this report highlights school affiliation and bonding strategies to prevent students from dropping out of school and provides examples of activities to address the needs of unaffiliated youth in middle and high school programs. Strategies presented include: maintaining persistent, long-term contact with students; adapting school rules; establishing discipline procedures and polices for exceptional students; and facilitating student participation in school-sponsored activities. The following recommendations are made: persistence in developing positive relationships between the student and the school; development of additional treatment options to discipline exceptional children rather than suspensions and administrative transfers; provision of support and direct intervention services to assist youth in joining school-sponsored activities; and expansion of the number of extracurricular activities. An appendix further describes the three ABC programs. (Contains 11 references.) (CR)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 398 672

Relationship Building & Affiliation Activities in School-Based Dropout Prevention Programs

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Bruininks
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Part of the ABC Dropout Prevention & Intervention Series prepared by ALAS, Belief Academy, and Check & Connect

Institute on Community Integration (UAP), *University of Minnesota*

Minneapolis Public Schools

Seattle Public Schools

University of California at Santa Barbara, Graduate School of Education

University of Washington, College of Education

EC304964

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Relationship Building & Affiliation Activities in School-Based Dropout Prevention Programs

Rationale & Recommendations for Action

Part of the ABC Dropout Prevention and Intervention Series

Published December, 1995.

Written by Eugene Edgar and Ernest Johnson.
This product reflects the collective efforts of all project directors.
Publication design by Charles Gibbons.

The development of this publication was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), through grant numbers H023K0001 (ALAS), H023K0011 (Belief Academy), and H023K0017 (Check & Connect). The content and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

ABC Project Directors

ALAS

Katherine Larson, University of California, Santa Barbara
Russell Rumberger, University of California, Santa Barbara

Belief Academy

Eugene Edgar, University of Washington
Ernest Johnson, Seattle Public Schools

Check & Connect

Sandra Christenson, University of Minnesota
David Evelo, Minneapolis Public Schools
Mary Sinclair, University of Minnesota
Martha Thurlow, University of Minnesota

Project Officer and Funding Agent

Helen Thornton, U.S. Department of Education,
Office of Special Education Programs

To request additional copies or alternative formats, please contact:

Publications Office
Institute on Community Integration (UAP)
University of Minnesota
150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
612/624-4512

Introduction

> ***"Human development occurs in the context of an escalating psychological ping-pong game between two people who are crazy about each other."***[1]

This quote from Uric Bronfrenbrenner describes parent-child interactions, but it is also a good description of the positive relationship possible between adults and youth in schools. As long as a solid "ping-pong" game keeps going on between staff and youth, the youth are likely to have positive feelings about the school and their role as students. They will feel bonded to the school. When this "game" is interrupted for any reason (e.g., students do not feel an adult cares about them, teachers or other school staff feel disrespected by students, students move frequently and do not have the opportunity to form positive relationships, and so on) it is very likely the student will feel estranged from school. These estranged youth are at risk for not completing high school and for experiencing all the subsequent negative effects of being a high school dropout. Youth with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities are more likely to be estranged from school than their peers without disabilities.

The purpose of this booklet is to clearly define school affiliation and bonding strategies and provide specific examples of activities that we used in addressing the needs of unaffiliated youth in middle and high school programs. These ideas were derived from the experiences of three dropout prevention programs for youth with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities. Over the past five years, our three projects found the activities summarized here to be successful in increasing feelings of affiliation to schools, to school programs, and to individual staff by youth who were estranged from school at the beginning of the project.

Common Strategies & Project-Specific Examples

> ***Building relationships between students and adults in school and promoting students' affiliation with school emerged as a common theme across the three projects.***

The goal of building relations and promoting school affiliation emerged independently across the programs as a significant dropout prevention and intervention component. Moreover, this common goal was achieved using three similar strategies:

- Persistent, long-term contact with students;
- Adapting school rules, discipline procedures and policies for exceptional students; *and*
- Facilitating student participation in school-sponsored activities.

The specific tactics used to implement the strategies varied widely from program to program. We learned that the specific activity was not as critical as ensuring that the goal was undertaken in some way. In fact, it seemed that the most powerful activities were

those that remained true to the goal while evolving within the particular context of the school community and being tailored to the special interests of the participating students. We hope that teachers and program developers will find this information to be a useful guideline for building student affiliation. It is important to state "up-front" that all these procedures required additional staff or the reallocation of existing resources. There is no "free lunch" and, as with most problems, you pay as you go. We recommend early payment and trying your best to increase school affiliation and bonding with all students, including those with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities, in order to help youth graduate and make a successful transition to meaningful adult lives.

Background Information

Affiliation has been widely discussed in the literature and is generally conceded to be an important aspect of positive school experiences for youth.[2] Wehlage and his colleagues[3] define affiliation as a student's belief that a significant adult from the school personally cares about him or her as an individual. Teachers who value student opinions and help students feel successful are perceived to be caring by students.[4] The caring adult in the school setting behaves in a sincere manner that convinces the student that he or she is more important than the content matter. Noddings[5] calls this individual the "all caring." This is a difficult message to convey if it is not true and raises the issue of whether teachers and other school personnel like their work and the range of students they teach. It also brings up the issue of hiring teachers and educational staff who like youth and are capable of relating to – and believing in – the diverse youth found in today's schools.

The examination of teacher behavior and youth from ethnic minority backgrounds has also generated literature related to affiliation. Kleinfeld[6] proposed a four dimensional matrix of teacher expectations, designated as "high demand" or "low demand," and teacher warmth with individual students, designated as "warm" or "cold." The most effective teachers with native Eskimo youth were found to be warm-demanders – teachers who had formed a personal bond with individual students, whom students believed cared about them as individuals, and who made high demands on their academic and social behavior. Delpit,[7] in her classic article on power relationships in schools, stated that African American students prefer teachers who provide clear and direct instructions about the expectations in the classroom. These same students "demand" that teachers earn their respect daily by being strong enforcers of fair and consistent rules. Noblit[8] defined this combination of caring and demand as "moral authority, power used in the moral service of others."

The method of showing warmth and making demands may vary, but the core value of caring holds across the varying backgrounds of individual students.

The research literature is clear that school policies and, in turn, educators and all other adults in the school need to be sensitive to cultural differences that affect how students perceive adults in authority, whether the differences are based on ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or some other defining characteristic. The methods of showing warmth and making demands may vary from group to group but the core value of caring holds across the varying backgrounds of individual students. The work of Kleinfeld[9] is eminently clear on the power of relationships demonstrating warmth and respect (e.g., showing interest in the personal lives of the students) and demand for high levels of performance (e.g., as an expression of belief in the student's ability) and behav-

ior in the classroom. Educators do not necessarily need to share the same background and experience as their students, but they do need to be aware of differences and to believe in each student's ability. Educators can express this belief by demanding the highest performance possible from each student and providing the support necessary to do this.

Persistent, Long-Term Contact

To what extent are procedures in place to promote persistent, long-term contact? For example, do teachers of students with disabilities stay with the same adolescents for several years or work with a new group of students each year?

Persistence on the part of the adults in school is critical and is shown in a variety of ways. Many of these students require a long time for the interventions to take effect. Many of these students require adults to stick with them, even when the students continue to make bad choices. The teaching process often requires persistence and patience on the part of the teacher. The lack of consistent adults in students' school lives decreases feelings of belonging.[10] Noddings and Etzioni advocate that secondary schools need to attend to continuity – defined here as consistency of teacher and place over periods longer than one year – to engender student affiliation.[11] Thus, an alternative is to increase the number of years teachers and other staff are assigned to any given group of students in order to increase the likelihood of bonds forming between them. Examples of how the three projects promoted persistent, long-term contact with students are provided. Note that the interaction between adult and student focused most predominantly on the student's educational progress.

Examples of Long-Term Contact

■ ALAS – Los Angeles

The ALAS project in Los Angeles demonstrated the notion of continuity described by Noddings, Kester, and Etzioni in that the counselors who worked with the students remained with them over a three-year period.[12] This continuity of staff, especially meaningful staff who have established firm, positive bonds with students, cannot be overemphasized as an important aspect of creating school affiliation among students.

ALAS used project counselors to provide ongoing support to target youth. Counselors devoted additional time to individual students, assisted students and families in accessing community resources, and attended to improved home-school communication. To increase school affiliation and status within the school organization, students in the ALAS project were given frequent positive reinforcement such as praise, outings, recognition ceremonies, certificates, and positive calls to parents for meeting goals or improving behavior, attendance, and school work. Students were allowed to "hang out" in the ALAS lounge at lunch or after school and were encouraged to bring friends to ALAS parties.

The counselors performed a number of tasks to support the students in school. A critical component of the interaction between the counselors and students was the guidelines surrounding counselor-student interactions. The staff concentrated on listening to youth;

their questions focused on how students felt about issues as well as assessing pertinent facts about an issue. Counselors were more successful when students viewed them as trusting, helpful individuals. This building of trust was demonstrated by fulfilling youth preferences, doing favors for kids to show care, and by being courteous and showing respect to the students. The counselors would repeatedly go to bat for their students. For example, doing a favor for a student within a day showed the student that the adult had their interest at heart and had power. These guidelines allowed the counselors to form powerful trusting relationships with youth and these relationships allowed the counselors to be effective in developing interventions that the youth would accept as their own.

One of the major interventions of ALAS was intensive attendance monitoring. Students were monitored for period-by-period attendance. Parents were contacted daily about truancy or extended absence. Students were required to make up missed time. The counselors developed individualized plans for students with attendance problems. These interventions included wake-up calls, transporting students to school, locating truant students and returning them to school, and visually checking to see if a student was in class. This was all accomplished with positive adult contacts that communicated a personal interest in the student's attendance, well-being, and belief that the student was valued.

From these types of activities the ALAS project developed four principles that guided student-adult interactions to increase student affiliation, instill hope, promote empowerment, and allow students to feel they were valued members of the school community. Three of these are listed here and the forth is included in the section on school policy:

- **Accept responsibility for and be accountable for each student's growth and progress**. This principle is primary and drives the other three principles. The ALAS staff held themselves responsible for monitoring the growth and facilitating the progress of each individual student. Poor student performance was viewed as project failure – not a student or family failure – and as such demanded that approaches be recast to better meet the needs of the individual student. This aspect of the program required ongoing assessment of student performance so program activities could positively impact student performance.
- **Accept students as they are without blaming them**. Many students come from homes with limited financial and personal resources and often bring with them many other issues and problems that are likely to affect their school performance. ALAS counselors were aware of this, and open to modifying programs and policies in order to accept and value students for who they are *and* for the skills they bring with them.
- **Nurture and provide compassion to students' many needs and their complex situations**. Many students are economically and psychologically needy. Many are fragile. High-risk, low income students demand a lot of attention. They often need daily monitoring of their attendance and performance. They require frequent feedback on their performance and growth and adults who have time to listen. They need help in negotiating interactions with their families and friends. They often require assistance in dealing with community agencies. ALAS counselors were ready and willing to respond to problems at a moment's notice in a nurturing and caring manner.

The guidelines proposed by ALAS resemble many of the notions proposed by Delpit[13] by making power explicit and by sharing power and decision making with the youth. These guidelines also demonstrate the ideas of Noddings with the ALAS counselors being "all caring" and putting the individual ahead of the content of schooling and the needs of adults or program.

■ Belief Academy – Seattle

The Belief Academy provided consistent adult staff over time, which allowed students and their families to form long-term positive relationships with staff. In the case of the Belief Academy, these staff included teachers, case managers (family liaisons), and the program director. As was the case in the other two programs, Belief provided a case manager that assisted students and family in accessing community resources and facilitated home-school communication. These extra staff filled a crucial role that teachers alone did not have the time or skills to fill.

In the Belief Academy, successful teachers displayed the warm/demander characteristics described by Kleinfeld.[15] For example, during the first year, the successful teaching team consisted of an African American male and an African American female who worked hard at forming close, personal relationships with their students by inquiring about family members, by "connecting" with students daily and discussing some personal issue with them, and by taking interest in the students' lives outside the classroom.

These same teachers developed a strict code for appropriate classroom behavior that was totally and consistently enforced – first by the teachers and later by elected student leaders. Concurrent with the behavior rules was a high expectation for academic work and frequent "pep talks" about excellence and performance. The teachers took every opportunity to point out examples of hard work and good achievement and were especially conscious of commenting on every student, regardless of academic level, when meaningful gains were demonstrated. This teaching team was able to provide a model for non-African American teachers to perform in the same manner for students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, demonstrating that the interactional style, not the ethnicity of the teacher, was the crucial factor.

A second team of teachers consisting of two European American women, working with a different group of Belief Academy students, made up primarily of African American males, developed similar relations with the students using slightly different strategies. These teachers developed personal relationships with their students by interacting with them in an individual manner around school work and out of school activities (e.g., ropes courses, horseback riding lessons, trips to museums, camping trips) and by enforcing a strict, yet flexible, classroom behavior code. This behavior code was also reinforced by electing student leaders to enforce the code. This team took somewhat longer to form the positive bonds, but through consistently maintaining high standards, empowering the students, and working at forming personal relationships with the students, these teachers were able to form strong, long lasting bonds with the students. There were as many teaching teams in the Belief Academy experience over three years that were unable to form positive bonds with the students as there were successful teaching teams. The teacher traits of being able to work with a partner and being a warm/demander appeared to be the crucial aspects of the successful teams.

These examples are consistent with the ideas of warm/demander professed by Kleinfeld, the explicit teacher who daily justifies his or her position of respect as described by Delpit, and the "moral authority" of Noblit.[16]

■ Check & Connect – Minneapolis

Check & Connect/Partnership for School Success used additional adults to provide consistent student contact over time, as did ALAS. This adult – called a "monitor" – allowed students to form long-term positive adult relations with project staff or the monitor would

provide support to maintain a pre-existing connection between a student and a school staff member. The monitors' efforts focused on keeping youth engaged in school by facilitating communication among school staff, family members, students, and community contacts and by assisting students and families obtain resources. Monitors' efforts were guided by the "Check & Connect" monitoring and school engagement procedure.

The monitor followed individual students' daily progress over a two- to three-year period and devised and implemented interventions when needed. The "Check" part of the procedure focused on daily monitoring of six indicators of risk that are amenable to intervention: absence; tardiness/skipping; behavioral referral; in-school suspension; out-of-school suspension; and failing classes. The "Connect" portion of the procedure consisted of four core strategies for all students: providing general information to the student about the monitoring system; providing regular specific feedback to the student about his or her educational progress; specific discussions with the student about the economics of staying in school; and regular problem solving with the student about the risk factors. Part of the first component of the "Connect" portion involved immediate problem solving with and for students exhibiting high-risk behaviors and the relevant adults (i.e., parents, teachers, agency staff). The response to high-risk behaviors generally involved activities of academic support (e.g., tutoring), problem solving (e.g., troubleshooting, accessing community services), and/or facilitating exploration of community service and recreational activities (e.g., after-school activities). The students knew someone was going to check up on them regularly regardless of their behavior – positive or negative.

Through these interactions, the monitor, often in conjunction with some other adult in the school, filled the role of the caring person in school. Any caring adult in the school environment is a potential contact for youth, and these relationships should be encouraged and nurtured by school policy. The monitors demonstrated their caring by checking on students on a daily basis and offering support when needed. Ongoing contact often required the monitor to call the home if the student did not show up for school, provide tutorial services, give praise for completing assignments, and advocate for the student with the school administration. A few students, for example, needed assistance and support with personal hygiene and finding appropriate school clothing because the lack of these skills was interfering with their attendance. At times the monitor, in collaboration with school staff, would intervene on behalf of the student by arranging for community agency support or family assistance. For example, transportation was often arranged by the monitor and, on occasion, assistance with housing needs was provided.

The success of the monitor was greatly enhanced by the trust that had developed between the monitor and the student.

The success of the monitor was highly dependent upon the trust that developed between him or her and the student, and this success was often demonstrated by the student seeking out the monitor for informal discussions. Establishing trust was based in part on the monitor's willingness and effort to solve problems with students – as well as the "chemistry" between them. Concern was demonstrated by the time and energy the monitor gave to discover the supports and provide the student with the opportunity to use these supports. Through these persistent contacts and specific instances of support, the monitor and student developed an "escalating positive psychological ping-pong game" with each other – as is often the case between people who come to like each other.

These interventions are examples of promoting affiliation on behalf of a caring adult who intercedes with individual students to help youth feel they are important to someone

in the school.[17] They are also consistent with the caring philosophy of Noddings[18] and the importance of believing that there is one person who cares enough about youth to regularly check on their performance.[19]

Adapting Rules & Policies

Issues of fairness are presently being questioned. Intense pressure exists for urban school districts to ensure safety in the schools – often to the extent that overly punitive consequences are being enforced for minor disciplinary infractions.

What procedures are in place to determine whether or not inappropriate behaviors are related to the students' disability? For example, is the student's case manager involved in the decision to suspend the student from school?

Adult authority that students perceive to be fair and effective in schools has been found to foster student feelings of belonging and being valued.[20] Conversely, non-affiliated students often comment on the lack of fairness in school rules or how the rules are applied to different groups within the school.

Youth who are unaffiliated often believe they are singled out unfairly by school authorities and punished for behaviors other students engage in without being punished. The projects found that students with challenging behaviors began to truly trust staff through the process of helping students and their families understand the rationale behind the rules, while at the same time advocating with school officials on behalf of the youth to ensure fair and appropriate application of school policy.

In writing about communitarian schools, Etzioni[21] claimed that self-discipline occurs when individual students accept the reason for a rule and make it part of their value set. The process of internalizing rules is complex, but certainly involves discussion about the reason for a rule and the consequences of not having specific rules. In essence, discipline needs to be viewed as a procedure for teaching positive behaviors rather than as punishment for inappropriate ones. Schools need to develop rules and policies that can be administered fairly and reasonably without increasing students' risk for dropping out.

Examples of Adaptations of Policies & Rules

■ ALAS – Los Angeles

The ALAS staff viewed discipline issues as teaching opportunities. Students who broke the rules were directly confronted by project staff, but consequences were always put in terms of the student learning to engage in the appropriate behavior. The phrasing of discipline procedures and the interactions between the adults and the students were the critical differences between discipline as punishment and discipline as teaching.

When a problem occurred and a student misbehaved, student feelings were acknowledged by the staff and the students were asked to contribute to problem solving by volunteering their opinions about events. When discussing solutions, students were always allowed the final decision, even if it was not the most constructive choice – staff helped students evaluate possible consequences of their chosen solutions.

While it is important not to set students up for failure, it was crucial that students be given both the chance to try and the power of decision over their lives in order to learn to constructively solve problems for themselves. The stress between students making choices for themselves and yet protecting the students from failure and harm was the thin line that ALAS counselors had to walk. A fourth principle developed by the ALAS project guided adult-student interactions:

- **Alter and individualize school procedures and policies**. Much of what needs to be done to assist students will require school staff to take the time to really listen to students and their families and be ready and willing to respond in the ways described. ALAS found that it is impossible to succeed with these students if the school context is not tailored to the students' individual psychological needs and skills. Flexibility and accommodation on the part of the school are absolutely essential to adequately meet the needs of high-risk students and to do so in a manner that the students will "see" the evidence that the rules are fair and equitable to them.

The ALAS project clearly demonstrates the need for schools to be flexible in their policies and practices in relationship to student needs. This is especially true regarding scheduling classes, allowing students to take courses out of sequence, allowing students to start school late or leave school early, or in modifying assignments for specific students.

Schools are prone to suspend students without taking into account their individual circumstances. Suspension for absenteeism appears to be especially counterproductive for students with attendance problems. ALAS staff found that a variety of family-school interactions had to be offered in order to be effective across the range of diverse family cultures. School flexibility and willingness to address individual student needs and strengths was a critical component of maintaining youth school affiliation.

■ Belief Academy – Seattle

Belief addressed the issue of fairness through an emphasis on classroom rules. Because of the self-contained nature of the program, building-level policies were established by the Belief Academy and therefore were not a source of conflict. Students played an active role in developing and enforcing the classroom rules. Over time this involvement resulted in the students accepting responsibility for living by the rules. Since Belief was a school within a school, alterations to typical suspension rules were enacted. This discretion in interpreting rules allowed them to be more flexible and fair in addressing the needs of individual students. For example, Belief used in-school suspension, which was staffed by Belief, as the primary mode of addressing many acting-out problems. This flexibility allowed for a more individualized approach for many students. Belief's policy was to apply school district rules when the infraction took place outside the program. On these occasions, staff advocated for the fairest sanctions for the particular infraction.

■ Check & Connect – Minneapolis

The Check & Connect/Partnership for School Success program protected and enhanced students' affiliation with school by helping students solve challenging problems and by adapting school rules and policies on behalf of students and their families. These adaptions ranged from changing students' schedules to requesting instructional modifications to advocating for alternatives to out-of-school suspension. Two school policies in particular that affected student affiliation with schools were discipline procedures and ad-

ministrative transfers. One of the most problematic practices was the use of out-of-school suspension for nonviolent behavior – policies that did not allow for interpretation at the individual student level. Second was the use of administrative transfers, typically for students with behavior problems, for reasons ranging from being a response to involvement in a fight to an effort to find a program that more closely met the student's needs. The transfers result in mobility and student mobility is a crucial factor in the formation of positive school connections – students who move frequently seldom form positive bonds with their school. When schools transfer students from one school to another, it decreases the probability of students forming positive affiliations.

Many students and parents view these rules as unfair and inconsistently implemented. It was not uncommon for a student to be referred to the office and recommended for suspension for skipping class. One youth residing in a shelter was suspended for not having proper gym attire. Another student was recommended for expulsion for unknowingly having mace in her locker. For students whose connection with school is fragile to begin with and whose behaviors are somewhat related to their disability, out-of-school suspensions are usually counterproductive. The monitors worked with assistant principals to assure that students who were referred for suspension were held accountable in a manner other than depriving them of instruction, which is the case with out-of-school suspension. Because monitors were aware and able to provide contextual information and were available for consultation when situations arose, administrators were able to make more informed and appropriate decisions. Alternative plans were collaboratively developed, such as in-school suspension or after-school detention. This type of individualization became more routine once the monitors and administrators grew to trust one another.

Facilitating Student Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

What procedures are in place to help unaffiliated students access school sponsored activities? For example, do resource staff in the schools have time allocated for personally connecting disengaged youth to after-school activities?

School affiliation can be increased by providing opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities that interest the student.[22] Affiliation is directly related to the feeling of belonging and contributing to an organization. Participation in school-based activities provides an opportunity for students to feel a valued part of the school community. Athletics is the clearest example of this notion. However, many youth are not inclined or able to take advantage of the opportunity offered by formal sports teams. Other opportunities offered to students to join school organizations are often tied to academic performance (e.g., publications, clubs, government) and are often limited in the number of students who can participate.

The availability of multiple opportunities for a diverse range of students to participate in such activities will increase school affiliation. Sometimes the school activities found at typical middle schools and high schools are of little interest to some students. In these cases, schools may find it necessary to expand the range of school-sponsored activities. Some of these activities may need to be geared specifically for youth with special needs. Ethnic interest groups, dance and music groups, natural helpers, volunteer opportunities,

business clubs (e.g., DECCA), and occupational related organizations (e.g., photography groups, Future Teachers, health sciences interest groups) are all possibilities that may attract some students to a school-sponsored group. Variety is a key issue as is providing opportunities for students to "invent" and create their own interest groups.

In addition to opportunity, attention needs to be given to inviting new students into the organization and guiding them through the first stages of forming a group affiliation. Certainly, warm caring teachers or other adults who are supervising the organization play a crucial role. They can personally invite students, help them fill out application forms, get prohibitive fees waived, or pair students up with peers or mentors for the first few sessions. However, planning outreach to specific groups of uninvolved students is also necessary if the activities are to reach those students most in need of such affiliation. Part of this outreach might include skill building opportunities for those students who have interest but lack the skills to be successful.

Examples of Opportunities for Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

■ ALAS – Los Angeles

The ALAS project provided students with multiple opportunities to participate in formal school activities, mostly developed by ALAS students and supported by ALAS staff. These included clubs as well as the ALAS lounge, which was viewed as a "safe spot" to escape from the pressures of the school day as well as a place to socialize with friends. Hot chocolate was often served before school and occasional pizza lunches were provided in the lounge. ALAS staff also encouraged and personally assisted students to join school-sponsored activities and run for elected student offices. Indeed, ALAS students were elected to numerous student body offices when they became ninth graders. Both the ALAS lounge and ALAS clubs were joined by non-ALAS students which gave ALAS students an extra sense of prestige with school peers.

Numerous ALAS parties, to which family and friends could be invited, were centered around holidays. Such activities expanded the notion of ALAS as outreach to students to include their families and friends in the caring circle, as well as to provide the students with the opportunity to be connected to a formal school activity. There were evening and weekend outings sponsored by ALAS, often as a reward for achievement, as well as frequent public acknowledgment for student improvement. In this way student progress was explicitly recognized, and individual incremental improvements noted.

Staff also assisted students in joining community activities such as boxing and hockey programs run by the local police precinct; tutoring and homework assistance programs; karate and dance classes; youth leadership clubs; and community volunteer programs. These programs provided additional forums for students to receive positive adult interaction and to reinforce the notion that ALAS was an extended support system for students.

■ Belief Academy – Seattle

The Belief Academy designed its own activities to facilitate student involvement in school-based activities. These activities included overnight camping trips, excursions to museums, student performances with families invited, outings to professional athletic

events, and in-school clubs and sports teams. The Belief Academy purchased t-shirts and jackets identifying the students as members of Belief. There were annual family picnics and award nights. Formal Belief Academy promotion ceremonies were held at the conclusion of the eighth grade. All these activities contributed to the idea that Belief was a family and that all the members had their valued place.

Three specific activities were especially successful. One of these was a hydroplane club which was inspired by a teacher who was a hydroplane fan. The club built model boats and displayed them at local events, visited local hydroplane manufacturers, and were invited to attend local races. In fact, a local hydroplane carried the Belief Academy logo in races. As word spread, non-Belief students requested to be part of the club. Many fathers became involved, and over the course of the year there were over twenty-five after-school or weekend events centered around this activity. The students gained considerable prestige from their peers and family members for being involved in the club.

Another successful activity was a play that a seventh grade student wrote. The entire class then produced and performed it for a parents' night. Later, the same talent produced a public service announcement for a local television station. For the play, which depicted gang life among teenagers, students developed the scenery and props. They performed the play for an additional joint parents' night. Every student in the class had a role in the event and was responsible for its success. These activities took place over several months and provided the students with a focal project that culminated in an authentic performance. The students developed strong group affiliation through this activity.

A Belief basketball team was developed and continued for three years. The team played in a community center league, included cheerleaders, managers, and statisticians (all Belief students) during one year, had attractive uniforms, and attracted non-Belief students to join. There was considerable parent support for this activity and the team played at various locations. Some of the students on the team, both male and female and Belief and non-Belief, have gone on to play basketball on their high school teams.

These activities allowed a wide range of students and their families to be involved in school-sponsored events. There are few formal school activities at the middle school level in the Seattle schools and these activities offered the students opportunities to experience teamwork and valued social activities as well as to be an important part of a pro-social group. The activities were staffed by Belief staff and, as such, provided multiple opportunities for bonding between the Belief staff and students.

■ Check & Connect – Minneapolis

In relation to school-sponsored activities, Check & Connect focused on assisting students in becoming involved in existing after-school activities or community service opportunities. The basic premise was to encourage and support students' participation so that when the project ended or when the student moved, the youth would be accustomed to being involved in typical school activities. The monitors assisted individual students in various ways to facilitate this involvement. Efforts to facilitate participation included making home visits to get permission forms signed, helping students fill out forms to waive participation fees, talking with students about the options, taking students to meetings, helping to coordinate transportation, and assisting in staffing activities.

Some new group activities were developed to encourage students to take part in a school-sponsored activity. A community service tutoring program was established for the students to work with children in an adjacent early childhood program. These service opportunities allowed the middle school students to feel like productive members of their

community and to be successfully affiliated with school. The project staff also worked with community education either to facilitate or co-teach after-school activities, such as basketball, double dutch jump rope, cooking classes, pottery and craft classes. Project staff also compiled a list of community resources and spoke with the contact person regarding after-school activities for students. The list was given to the students and family members and was reviewed one-on-one in small groups.

Summary & Recommendations

Consistent with major theories of dropping out, we believe school affiliation is essential to prevent youth from disengaging from school.[21] The ABC Projects developed a set of school affiliation activities. In doing so, we learned about essential components of school affiliation as described in a range of research literature. Developing strong, positive adult student relationships was the core concept of the affiliation activities. These positive relationships were developed through persistent, long term contact with the students that focused on building a trusting relationship between individual students and at least one adult. This often necessitated the modification of school rules and policies.

Although many of the activities our projects found successful were possible for teachers and other school staff to implement, we are quite aware of the extra demands many of these procedures place on school staff. Despite all our efforts, we were unable to develop procedures that did not require extra staff and resources. We are aware that any set of procedures that require schools to re-allocate resources or, even worse, find additional resources are less likely to be seriously considered. On the other hand, we are totally convinced that without these additional staff and resources, the youth with whom we worked have an even lower probability of completing school or making a reasonable transition into adulthood. Schools, and society in general, need to face the harsh realities of the lives of these youth and their families. If we as a society are committed to the ideas of equality and opportunity for all our citizens and believe that all our youth deserve to have a valued place in our schools, then we must find the means to provide these resources.

The ABC projects were able to increase the school affiliation activities for students. However, doing so required additional staff or redefining job functions for existing staff (school psychologists, counselors, social workers) to focus staff more on interventions and less on procedural assessment. This finding seems to indicate that school administrators need to seriously consider reallocating funds for additional staff members who can attend to the affiliation needs of youth at risk of dropping out of school. The monitoring process developed by the Check & Connect project in Minneapolis and the daily teacher feedback form used by ALAS in Los Angeles provide methods to monitor students and determine which students will need the additional staff resources.

■ Persistence

Persistence in developing these positive relationships was a common theme among the three projects. Many of the youth served by the projects had a long history of negative interactions with school authorities and had developed strong feelings of distrust. In many instances their behaviors offended and rejected those who tried to form positive bonds with them. They behaved in ways that made it difficult to like and respect them. While

there were some youth who never formed positive bonds with a school-based individual, there were many others who initially rejected staff attempts to form positive relationships but later did form positive bonds and make substantial improvements in their behaviors and life chances. The students with whom we worked were difficult and challenging, and staff need strong egos and a firm value system that believes youth are worth saving and can be helped. Relationships were built around the process of understanding the student's behavior and roots of mistrust, listening to the student's perspectives, and demonstrating a willingness to work through alternative solutions.

This is not work for the faint of heart. Staff need to be recruited and hired who display these values. Ongoing training and support need to be made available to them. School administrators need to demonstrate persistence in supporting their staff and program. Administrators, too, need a strong belief in the possibility of helping these youth.

■ School Rules & Policies

Probably the most difficult aspect of the project was working on school rules and policies. Part of civility is learning to live by society's rules: many of these youth test the limits of these rules. Suspensions and administrative transfers that overlook the needs of youth simply postpone the inevitable – their total disenfranchisement. On the other hand, when these youth flagrantly break established rules, systems are often without options. We found the lack of viable treatment options for youth who engaged in serious deviant behaviors to be extremely detrimental to the student and to cause school administrators to grow callous. Suspensions and transfers were often made for what seemed to be minor infractions. We believe these practices grew out of the concomitant desensitization of the administrators to the needs of youth. We believe *no* student should be suspended without placement in a treatment program that has been designed to address the specific needs of that student. Schools and other service agencies must address this problem and develop additional treatment options. With appropriate treatment options and a serious attempt by school personnel to create school rules and policies to meet the needs of youth, we believe many currently estranged students would form positive affiliation with schools.

■ School-Sponsored Activities

While school-sponsored activities provide many students with the opportunity to affiliate with the school, others do not take part in these activities. Some lack the skills to engage in the available activities, others are excluded because of grades or their behavior, some need assistance in joining groups, some encounter transportation problems, and far too often there is a lack of a range of activities that interest youth. The ABC programs found that with support and direct intervention many youth did join these activities and were successful. However, even with support, a significant number of youth did not participate in existing school-sponsored activities and we found it necessary to create additional activities. Schools and communities need to seriously consider expanding the number of extra-curricula activities for students. The expenditure of funds and energy will be well rewarded if care is taken in including the unaffiliated students in developing these options.

Youth who are estranged from schools and other institutions can be helped. It takes persistence, belief that youth can be and are worth saving, additional funds, creative thinking, and adults who are capable of being – in Urie Bronfrenbrenner's sense – crazy about youth and willing to play the ping-pong game for a long time.

Project Strategies for Promoting Relationship Building & School Affiliation

Persistent, Long-Term Contact

- **Continuity of school or project staff over a period of years**
  Examples: Project staff (i.e., counselors, monitors) worked with the same students as they moved from grade to grade and project staff regularly monitored indicators of risk, such as absences, behavioral referrals, suspensions, and failing classes.
- **Providing ongoing positive support**
  Examples: Project staff listened to students with respect, fulfilled their preferences when feasible, provided frequent praise and recognition, and facilitated communication among school staff.
- **Assisting students and families in accessing community resources**
  Examples: Project staff helped in communicating and obtaining needs from community agencies.
- **Involving families consistently in students' education**
  Examples: Project staff made positive phone calls to parents when students met goals and/or contacted parents immediately about absences.

Adapting Rules & Policies

- **Project staff advocating on students' behalf for individualization of discipline procedures and school policies**
  Examples: Project staff met with assistant principals to brainstorm about alternatives to out-of school suspension.
- **Students as part of the problem-solving process**
  Examples: Project staff involved students in developing and enforcing school rules and helped students learn to choose solutions and evaluate possible consequences.
- **Phrasing consequences for breaking rules in terms of student learning**
  Examples: Project staff approached discipline as a learning opportunity versus punishment.

Facilitating Student Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

- **Personally assisting students in joining school and community activities**
  Examples: Project staff made home visits to get permission forms signed, talked to students about options, and assisted with or arranged for transportation to activities.
- **Creating additional activities for students**
  Examples: Project staff formed clubs based on student preferences, initiated alternative sports teams, produced plays, skits, and talent shows, and established a community service tutoring program.
- **Project staff co-teaching after-school activities**
  Examples: Project staff assisted instructor in after-school activities to allow for larger student enrollment and to facilitate participation of youth with disabilities.

Appendix: The Federal Initiative

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), established three cooperative agreements under a program competition called "Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs for Junior High School Students in Special Education." The programs were to focus on youth with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities, with priority given to programs using a collaborative approach across spheres of influence – home, school, and community. Projects were funded from 1990 to 1995 to develop, refine, and evaluate dropout prevention and intervention strategies. This booklet is one of a series of five collaboratively developed products.

■ ALAS

ALAS stands for "Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success" and means "wings" in Spanish. The ALAS program focused on adolescents and their families, school, and community. ALAS was founded on the premise that the youth and their contexts of influence must be addressed simultaneously if dropout prevention efforts are to be successful. Assumptions central to the model are that each context needs individual reform to increase its positive influence on youth, and that barriers to communication and coherence between contexts must be bridged.

■ Belief Academy

Belief Academy consisted of five major components: program stability over time; intensive academic and behavioral intervention in grades seven and eight; family case management services; social support to students; and program options and ongoing support at the high school level. The Academy was based on several assumptions relating to students' skills in reading and math: the need for intensive instructional procedures with culturally relevant instruction; the needs of family or out-of-school activities that interfere with student progress; students' affiliation with the school program; the self-esteem and confidence of individual students; and the need for students and their families to constantly focus on and plan for post high school goals, in conjunction with a long-term support program that provides viable options for the goals to be achieved.

■ Check & Connect

Check & Connect/Partnership for School Success addressed the interacting systems of family, school, and community. The "Check" involves continuous assessment of student levels of engagement with school, by monitoring daily incidences of tardiness, absences, behavior referrals, suspensions, failing grades, and mobility. The "Connect" involves both monthly core connect strategies, and the addition of supplemental interventions when youth engaged in risk behaviors. This project is based on four assumptions: solving the dropout problem will require a multicomponent effort of home, school, community, and youth; leaving school prior to graduation is not an instantaneous event; students must be empowered to take control of their own behavior; and schools must be designed to reach out to families in partnership with the community.

Endnotes

1 Bronfrenbrenner, U. (1990). Discovering what families do. In D. Blankenhorn, S. Bayme, & J.B. Elshtain (Eds.) *Rebuilding the nest: A new commitment to the American family*. Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America.

2 Fine, M. (1986). Why urban adolescents drop into and out of public high school. *Teachers College Record*, 87, 393–409.
Bryk, A.S., & Thum, Y.M. (1989). The effects of high school organization on dropping out: An exploratory investigation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26, 353–383.

3 Wehlage, G.C., & Rutter, R.A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? In G. Natriello (Ed.) *School dropouts: Patterns and policies*, pp. 70–88. New York: Teachers College Press.

4 Fine, M. (1986), ibid 2.

5 Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

6 Kleinfeld, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *School Review*, 83, 301–344.

7 Delpit, L.D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280–298.

8 Noblit, G.W. (1993). Power and caring. *American Educational Research Jrnl*, 30, 23–38.

9 Ibid 6.

10 Etzioni, A. (1993). *The spirit of community: The reinvention of American society*. New York: Touchstone.
Kester, V.M. (1994). Factors that affect African-American students' bonding to middle school. *The Elementary School Journal*, 95, 63–73.
Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

11 Ibid 10.

12 Ibid 5, 10.

13 Ibid 7.

14 Ibid 5.

15 Ibid 6.

16 Ibid 6, 7, 8.

17 Ibid 3.

18 Ibid 5.

19 Bryk & Thum (1989), ibid 2.

20 Bryk & Thum (1989), ibid 2.

21 Ibid 10.

22 Hawkins, J.D., Von Cleve, E., & Catalano, R.F. (1991). Reducing early childhood aggression: Results of a primary prevention program. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30, 208–217.

23 Fine, M. (1986), ibid 2; Wehlage, G.C., et al. (1986), ibid 3.

ABC Dropout Prevention & Intervention Series Publications

- *PACT Manual: Parent and Community Teams for School Success*
- *Relationship Building & Affiliation Activities in School-Based Dropout Prevention Programs*
- *Staying in School: Strategies for Middle School Students with Learning & Emotional Disabilities*
- *Staying in School: A Technical Report of Three Dropout Prevention Projects for middle School Students with Learning and Emotional Disabilities*
- *Tip the Balance: Practices & Policies That Influence School Engagement for Youth at High Risk for Dropping Out*